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ABSTRACT

This series of discussion sessions and suggestions for further reading, was designed to serve as a guide for discussion groups made up of parents of preschool children. The first chapter discusses the organization of groups, leaders' qualifications, the general format of sessions, recordkeeping, and suggestions for the first and final sessions. The remaining chapters provide an outline of each of the following topics for the leader of the discussion groups: (1) children's learning; (2) communicating with one's child; (3) values; (4) stress management; (5) making and keeping rules; (6) handling negative feelings; (7) fears versus feelings of safety; (8) positive feelings about the parents' relationship with their child; (9) sex education for the preschooler; (10) coping with death; and (11) family life and security. Each chapter includes guidelines for using review techniques and questions to start the discussion; general information about the topic to be presented; discussion questions and activities; and guidelines for summarizing the discussion. Included is a list of six suggested readings. (GLR)

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ORGANIZING PARENT DISCUSSION GROUPS IN PRESCHOOLS

(A How To Guide)

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PREFACE

Parents are by and large vitally interested in how to do the best possible job of being a parent. Preschool directors and teachers are often called upon to answer questions about a child's development, communication skills, discipline or other topics. Thus, it is very helpful for preschool educators to set up a series of parent discussion groups that deal with these topics.

There are many how to books, lectures from experts and advice columns on the subject, but parents also need the actual experience of discussing and sharing information with other parents. Often parents know the right thing to do but need to know that other mothers and fathers are having some of the same joys and frustrations of parenting that they are experiencing.

This series of discussion sessions was developed so that parents of young children, with the added information from trained professionals, can support each other in their strengths and learn from each other how to grow through their common experiences.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This book was developed originally for use in Head Start parent discussion groups at the request of Theresa Counts, Director of a Head Start Program in USD 501-Topeka, Kansas and Barbara Hodges, a consultant to that program. Their interest and support is gratefully acknowledged and appreciated.

I also appreciate the contributions of the parents who participated so thoroughly in the discussion sessions. In addition, I am grateful to Clyde Rousey, Ph.D. for his critical and helpful reading of the manuscript. Because part of any book on parenting involves your own experiences, I would like to thank my sons, Wayne and Steven and their families, for making the experience of parenting so personally satisfying.

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Chapter One

ORGANIZATION OF GROUPS

This book is designed to be a guide for a series of discussion groups for parents of preschool children. Each individual topic can be covered in one session or extended to additional sessions to meet the needs of the group. Which topics are discussed and in what sequence should be at the discretion of the leader and/or the needs of the parents who are attending.

It is very important that each school or group using this book decide the reason for setting up the series of discussion groups. Some possible reasons might be: a commitment to general parent education, the leader/teacher has decided it would be helpful to the school, the parents have requested more involvement, or an idea that it may help the school run more smoothly with additional parent involvement. Information in this publication is focused on parenting of young children (birth through six years) in a preschool setting or in the home.

The emphasis should be on parent discussion, not lecturing from an expert. There should be a commitment to the sharing of parent ideas and experiences. The leader should first of all be a good listener so that the discussion can be kept

within the general boundaries outlined in the book. In addition, the leader should be able to respond to special emphases and concerns expressed in each group. The discussion should not focus on strengths or problems of individual children but center around general ideas and concerns of child rearing. If desired, individual notebooks for each parent can be provided for them to record their own thoughts, notes, ideas and plans for their individual family growth. Parents should be encouraged to make as many entries in their books as they think may be helpful to them. Space has been provided in this book for the leaders to keep a record of what goes on in each group around each topic and to record new ideas which may occur as the sessions progress.

General Information

The sessions have been designed to facilitate the most possible discussion among a group of parents and one leader trained in preschool education or in childhood development. Therefore, it will be helpful to limit the group to approximately six to ten persons. These sessions ideally should be offered on a weekly basis over consecutive weeks. This allows for the group to become a cohesive unit and facilitates discussion. However, other arrangements may need to be made based on the needs of the group. The sessions have been designed for one hour periods. The leader should keep the sessions within this time frame so

that participants will know that they will start and end on time. It will be up to each series of discussion groups to decide whether morning, afternoon, evening or weekend sessions will be the most convenient for the leader and group. Each session will be complete within its own time frame but discussions will be based on previous topics and, therefore, it will be most beneficial if participants can attend all sessions. If this is not possible, they should be encouraged to come, even if one or two times need to be missed for various reasons. The general setting should be comfortable with chairs arranged in a manner to facilitate face to face interaction and make talking among the participants as easy as possible. A small circle of chairs or an arrangement around a table will be the most advantageous. It will be helpful, also, if some kind of refreshments can be offered such as tea, coffee or soft drinks.

Leader Qualifications

It is assumed there is some general experience or knowledge of preschool training or early childhood development so that the discussion can be maintained around relevant issues. The leader should not be one of the parents but rather a professionally trained teacher or an outside individual familiar with child development issues.

General Format

Each session will be divided into three general sections:

1. General topic discussion by the leader with ideas to facilitate parent thought. Each section will include information about the topic based on general child development theories and practices. This part of the meeting should take about 10 minutes of the hour session.
2. A list of general discussion questions based on the information given in each section and its relevance to the experiences of the parents with their own children. This should be the main emphasis of the sessions and will take approximately 40 minutes of the time allotted.
3. A summary of the topic and discussion focus. A review of relevant points and observations and plans for the next session. This should take the last 10 minutes of the hour.

Record Keeping

The group can decide how they would like to keep a record of the sessions for future reference. Even though each participant may have their own individual notebook, it will be helpful for the group to have a summary of the information and discussion to refer to in later

sessions. The group may decide to tape record the sessions or have a note taker with the responsibility alternating for each session. The leader needs to be especially sensitive to the possibility that some participants may have specific handicaps in reading, writing or spelling and hence be reluctant to take notes. Special arrangements may need to be made. As a further backup, the leader should make appropriate notes during the session so that later reference can be made to ideas raised in the session. This will help tie one discussion topic to another. Space has been left between the printed discussion questions for this purpose.

Suggestions For The First Session

1. Have parents introduce themselves and tell why they were interested in the group.
2. Summarize the reasons for parents coming to the group and define some goals of the group, e.g.,
   a. to get some general information about child development.
   b. information on knowing how best to relate to and handle their child.
   c. chance to share information/experience with other parents.
   d. opportunity to get to know other parents and their children better.
   e. others, defined by each individual group.

3. Set up any general "housekeeping" rules, e.g., sessions will always last one hour so there is a need to start and stop on time. It is not mandatory to come to each session but it will be helpful because discussions will be related to and references will be made to past information and discussions. It there is a need to miss make sure they know to come to later sessions.
4. Discuss any fees involved, e.g. cost of parent notebook, money for coffee, etc.
5. Answer any questions about general procedures.
6. Explain the format:
   a. 10 minute general topic information
   b. 40 minute discussion time
   c. 10 minute summary

Suggestions For The Final Session

There should be some type of general summing up of the sessions. This can be done by reviewing notes made by the group or the leader which may be of particular interest to each parent in the group. In addition, some verbal acknowledgement should be made by the leader about the experience of mutual sharing and learning that has taken place within the group. Parents should be encouraged to express their reactions to the group experience but the leader should be careful not to interject personal conclusions or feelings.

Chapter Two

LEARNING

Being a good parent means
understanding how children learn best

Review And Questions

1. Ask the parents to review and summarize ideas that are of interest to them.
2. Ask for any questions about the sessions in general.

General Topic Information

1. Children learn best through a structured play experience. This learning through play changes with chronological age.
2. Each individual has their own special unique way of learning most efficiently. Some of us learn best through auditory (listening) channels, others through visual channels, some by manipulation (trial and error). Each child should be allowed to explore and develop their own special talent for learning.
3. In the preschool years, especially, it is interesting to look at learning in different areas such as:
   a. physical skills(running,jumping,climbing,etc.).
   b. emotional skills (learning to recognize

and deal with emotions such as anger, jealousy, love, friendship, fear, etc.).

c. social skills (how to make friends, manners, how to meet new people, etc.).

d. cognitive skills (learning how to count, recognize colors, print letters, etc.).

4. There is a wide range in age and developmental skills within each child's classroom or group. Some children may be ready to learn many new things while others are still at an earlier stage of development. There is also a range of when children are ready to learn new skills. For example, if parents in any group were asked at what age their child first learned to walk, or take a first step, answers would probably range from eight months to fourteen months, but both times are considered within normal limits. Some parents might give earlier and some later ages.

5. Some ways that parents can decide if a child is ready to learn a new skill are :

a. child is trying the skill without being asked, e.g., watching an older child writing and then trying to copy the letters.

b. the child asks for help with the first step, e.g., "Mom, help me ride my tricycle".

c. after help with the basic first step, the child

eagerly asks for more time with the project, e.g., when learning to tie shoes, after one or two demonstrations, the child repeatedly wants to try one more time.

d. there is a degree of success with the task when tried.

e. there is no undue amount of frustration, crying, avoidance or disinterest in the task.

6. Children need to be ready to learn new tasks on several different levels: physically, cognitively and developmentally. In addition, the opportunity must be available for learning.

7. Parents can help learning by:

a. making opportunity available, e.g. providing space to run, jump, climb or books to read or art materials to use.

b. providing a good example, e.g. talking about books, taking the child to the library, reading books and magazines themselves.

c. allowing children to learn through their own experiences. Letting them make mistakes and using trial and error contributes to learning.

d. being available to answer questions, showing interest, providing support.

e. participating with your child in the experience, e.g. going with them on a

nature walk and discussing the experience.

f. helping to structure learning by limiting choices available when appropriate, e.g. not letting a child watch television indiscriminately, but offering a choice of appropriate programs from which they can learn to make good choices themselves.

g. respecting all reasonable forms of activity and trying to understand why and what the child is doing and what they are learning in the process.

h. praising the act of trying/learning

8. Learning is a life-long process that should never stop. In pre-school years, it is vital to develop a respect and interest for the learning process that will be beneficial throughout a person's life.

Discussion Questions

1. How do you think you learn best? By doing, listening, reading or other ways. Let's take an example of an activity, such as learning how to operate a VCR, drive a new car, or learn your way around in a new city. If you were going to learn one of these skills (or another one that comes to mind) how would you go about doing it? LEADER'S NOTE: HAVE PARENTS DECIDE ON A SKILL

AND THEN WRITE A FEW NOTES ABOUT IT IN THEIR NOTEBOOKS, IF THEY DESIRE. THEN ASK EACH TO SHARE THEIR IDEAS.

2. How do you think your child learns best?

3. What are some skills that are considered "normal" for the following age child? LEADER'S NOTE: COMMENT SHOULD BE MADE ON THE NORMAL VARIATION WHICH CAN OCCUR AT ALL AGES IN VARIOUS SKILLS BECAUSE OF ENVIRONMENTAL, DIFFERENT INDIVIDUAL GROWTH RATES AND PHYSICAL FACTORS.

Within first year: SOME SKILLS WHICH MIGHT BE MENTIONED ARE- LEARNING TO ROLL OVER, CRAWL, STAND ALONE AND PERHAPS TAKE THE FIRST STEP, MAKES LOTS OF DIFFERENT SOUNDS, RESPOND TO OTHERS.

2 YEAR OLD: SOME SKILLS ARE- WALKING, RUNNING, LEARNING NEW WORDS, PUTTING WORDS TOGETHER, FOLLOWING SIMPLE DIRECTIONS.

3 year old: SOME SKILLS WHICH MIGHT BE MENTIONED COULD BE- USING EATING UTENSILS, TALKING IN 3-4 WORD SENTENCES IN UNDERSTANDABLE LANGUAGE, PUTTING ON OR TAKING OFF THEIR COAT, ETC.

4 year old: LEADER'S NOTE: SOME SKILLS MIGHT BE- COOPERATIVE PLAY WITH OTHER CHILDREN, BUTTONS CLOTHING, HELPS WITH HOUSEHOLD TASKS, ETC.

5 year old: LEADER'S NOTE: SOME SKILLS MIGHT BE- TAKING CARE OF SELF IN THE BATHROOM, DRESSING SELF, USING CRAYON FOR DRAWING, SPEAKS IN SENTENCES, ETC.

6 year old: LEADER'S NOTE: SOME SKILLS MIGHT BE- GOES TO SCHOOL ALONE, PRINTS SHORT WORDS, PLAYS SIMPLE TABLE GAMES, ETC.

4. Think of one new thing your child has learned in the last few months, e.g., how to print a letter or name, turn a somersault, work a hard puzzle or tell a familiar story. LEADERS NOTE: ENCOURAGE PARENTS TO MAKE NOTES IN THEIR BOOKS BEFORE OR DURING DISCUSSION.

   a. How did your child let you know that he/she was ready and interested in this skill?

   b. How did you help in the learning of the skill? For example, providing the opportunity or equipment, showing by demonstration, providing standby assistance, giving encouragement or praise, or other ways.

c. If the process becomes too hard or frustrating, what are some ways to handle the situation? LEADER'S NOTE: SOME POSSIBILITIES ARE TO EXPLAIN TO THE CHILD IT WILL BE EASIER WHEN THEY ARE OLDER, PROVIDE A SIMPLER VERSION OF THE TASK, BREAK THE PROCESS INTO SMALLER, EASIER TO HANDLE STEPS, PROVIDE "HANDS ON" DIRECT HELP, ETC.

5. What is a skill that you would like help to develop in your child? LEADER'S NOTE: ENCOURAGE PARENTS TO MAKE ENTRIES IN THEIR NOTEBOOKS FOR ALL PARTS OF THIS SECTION DURING THE DISCUSSION.

a. Why is it important that they have this skill?

b. What is one way that you could help?

c. What's another way you could help?

Summary

The leader and the parents together should summarize the important points covered in the LEARNING discussion.

LEADER'S NOTE: SOME OF THESE MIGHT BE:

1. THERE ARE DIFFERENT METHODS OF LEARNING
2. PARENTS PLAY AN IMPORTANT ROLE IN THEIR CHILD'S LEARNING BY PROVIDING GOOD EXAMPLES, GIVING ENCOURAGEMENT AND HELP AND MAKING OPPORTUNITY AVAILABLE
3. CHILDREN LEARN THROUGH PLAY
4. LEARNING IS A LIFE-LONG PROCESS

THE OPPORTUNITY SHOULD BE PRESENTED FOR ANY FINAL QUESTIONS OR COMMENTS ON THE DISCUSSION.

Chapter Three

COMMUNICATION

Being a good parent means
knowing how to communicate with your child

Review And Questions

1. Ask the parents to help review and summarize some points from the last discussion. Try to elicit some specific examples that the parents remember and ask if they used any of the ideas that were discussed the last time.
2. Ask for any further comments and questions about the sessions in general or on the last session in particular.

General Topic Information

1. Communicating with your child means both talking and listening.
2. Good talking skills for parents and children include the following:
   a. maintain good eye contact which means actually looking at the person, not out the window, over their shoulders or somewhere else.
   b. not doing two things at the same time that will distract from the message being given. An example would be watching TV and talking at the

same time.

c. elimination of any environmental distractions such as the stereo playing loudly.

d. being within easy communicating distance, e.g., not being too far away, not standing over a child or trying to talk from another room.

3. Good listening skills for parents or children include the following:

a. maintaining good eye contact

b. not doing two things at the same time that will distract from the message being listened to

c. elimination of any environmental distractions

d. not interrupting

e. not showing impatience, e.g., moving about in the chair, drumming fingers on the table or glancing away

4. Our earliest communication attempts have the quality of magic. When a baby makes a noise or cries, someone appears out of nowhere and gives comfort and attention. Therefore, most probably a child learns very early either the negative or, hopefully, positive consequences that ensue from making sounds. Therefore, the earliest attempts at communication are very important, both to children and to the parents.

5. There are many ways we communicate in addition to words. Silence is a great way of giving a message. We also communicate with gestures, pictures, written

language, sign language, body language or facial messages. Often we use two of more of these ways at the same time. For instance, we are all communicating with words right now, but we also are using gestures, body language and some written communication.

6. One skill we want to encourage in children is the act of replacing body language with words when appropriate. We need to develop the skill of verbalizing feelings such as anger instead of acting out the anger with temper tantrums or hitting. As children get older they should be encouraged to utilize their verbal skills in their expressions of feelings. Parents play a vital role in this process by setting good examples. It is helpful for children to hear parents honestly expressing feelings without resorting to hitting or using "hurtful" words with other people.
7. Verbal abuse is now recognized as an important contributor to low self-esteem of children. If you think of words or phrases that adults do not like to hear about themselves, such as "dumb", ""crazy", "stupid", "lazy" or a host of others, then you can easily understand why children are particularly vulnerable to this kind of abuse.
8. One way to look at our communication with children is to use the concept of talking AT, WITH or FOR a child. All are appropriate at some times but there should be a balance of all three.

a. Talking AT a child means that you are giving information directly and do not want or need any words or discussion given back. An example of this is when you need to discipline a child about inappropriate safety practices, such as running across a busy street without looking. However, if we only always talk AT a child, they cannot develop a sense of two way communication.

b. Talking WITH a child means that you want and expect communication to be two-way. You are interested in the child's input and opinion and you want the child to listen also to your communication. A good example of this type of communication is when you and your child are discussing interesting things that were observed on a walk. This type of communication is made difficult when you ask questions that the child cannot be expected to answer, such as " Why did you spill the milk?"

c. Talking FOR a child means that someone attempts to verbalize what they think the child is wanting to say, instead of the child saying it for himself. A negative consequence of doing this happens when a child could really make the response. For example, an older child may answer "yes" or "no" for a younger

child who has been asked if they want a drink of juice. The younger child loses out on the opportunity to develop the skill of making verbal choices. A positive use of talking FOR a child is when they do not yet have the verbal skills and need some help in expressing feelings. For example, when a child is feeling tired after a long day, they may not have the verbal or cognitive skill to recognize the reason they are feeling irritable and it will be helpful for an adult to assist them to recognize and verbally relate their feelings.

Discussion Questions

1. What does communication mean to each of you? How would you define the word? LEADERS NOTE: ENCOURAGE PARENTS TO MAKE NOTES DURING THE DISCUSSION IF THEY WISH.

2. What kinds of communication are we using right now?

3. Can you remember when your child first understood what you asked them to do? An example would be when you asked them to wave bye-bye and they actually did it. What was your reaction? How did you teach or encourage that action? LEADER'S NOTE: ENCOURAGE PARENTS TO MAKE NOTES BEFORE AND DURING THE DISCUSSION.

4. Can you remember when you first thought your child said a word or sound that you KNEW was really a communication attempt? What was your reaction and how did you encourage it?

5. How has your child communicated with you in the past 24 hours? LEADER'S NOTE: PARENTS MAY LIST SUCH THINGS AS WORDS, TEMPER TANTRUMS, SILENCE, DISOBEDIENCE, PICTURES, GESTURES, ETC.

6. How have you communicated with your child in the past 24 hours?

7. Think and write down examples of communicating AT your child. LEADER'S NOTE: HAVE PARENTS SHARE AS MUCH OF THEIR NOTES AS THEY WISH AND THEN DISCUSS THEIR IDEAS IN GENERAL.

8. Think and write down examples of communicating WITH your child.

9. Think and write down examples of communicating FOR your child. (LEADER'S NOTE: HAVE PARENTS SHARE NOTES ABOUT THESE IDEAS AS THEY WISH AND PROVIDE TIME FOR DISCUSSION.

Summary

The leader and the parents together should summarize the the important points in the COMMUNICATION section.
LEADER'S NOTE: SOME OF THESE MIGHT BE:

1. UNDERSTANDING HOW YOU COMMUNICATE WITH YOUR CHILD BY STUDYING YOUR USE OF AT, WITH AND FOR WAYS OF TALKING.
2. THERE ARE POSITIVE WAYS TO SUPPORT GOOD COMMUNICATION BY BEING A GOOD LISTENER AND A GOOD TALKER.

3. COMMUNICATION STARTS IN INFANCY WITH THE FIRST SOUNDS A CHILD MAKES. EVERYTHING WE DO EITHER IS A POSITIVE OR NEGATIVE CONSEQUENCE FOR THOSE EARLY ATTEMPTS AT COMMUNICATION.

BE SURE TO INQUIRE OF THE GROUP MEMBERS IF THEY HAVE ANY FURTHER THOUGHTS ABOUT THIS DISCUSSION.

Chapter Four

VALUES

Being a good parent
is passing on your important values to your child

Review And Questions

1. Ask the parents to review and summarize some ideas from the last session. Try to elicit some specific examples and probe to see if they used any of the points discussed last time in interactions with their child during the time from the last meeting.
2. Ask for any further comments and questions about the sessions in general or on the last session in particular.

General Topic Information

1. We all have available a large variety of values from which to choose. Examples of commonly agreed values are honesty, truthfulness, fair play, respect for other people and property, and the consequences of illegal behavior.
2. From these values we can choose those we think are particularly important and want to be guiding principles in our lives and which ones we choose to challenge or deemphasize.

3. Different people and cultures often have divergent opinions about which traits or values are more or less important.
4. The emphasis on different values may also be altered with time for individuals or groups. For instance, fifty years ago the vast majority of families included a father who went to work while the mother stayed home with the children and did not go out of the home to work. This was considered an important family structure. In current life, we all recognize how this value of "mother at home full time" has changed for many families.
5. We are not born with our values programmed in us. Civilization over the centuries has evolved a basic core of values that have seemed to work the best for the most people. These values allow us to live the most comfortably with others. We learned our values in childhood from our parents or other important individuals in our lives and then probably examined them and integrated them into our lives according to how we felt the most comfortable.
6. There are several steps that we go through in teaching our children what values we want them to have in their lives.
   a. Making the child aware of values their parents think are important such as not hitting a sibling. This is KNOWING the right

thing to do.

b. Helping a child want to do the right thing because it has positive consequences for him or will result in negative consequences. This is WANTING to do the right thing.

c. Helping the child actually do the right thing. This may be through verbal means or through physical assistance to complete the act. In the instance given above, this may mean containing the child so that he does not hit the sibling. This is DOING the right thing.

Discussion Questions

1. How did you get your values? Who or what was important in developing them? Think of one particular value such as honesty or fair play. What kinds of support can you remember from childhood that addressed this value? LEADER'S NOTE: ENCOURAGE PARENTS TO MAKE NOTES BEFORE AND DURING THE SESSION.

2. What kind of values do you want your children to have? Could you rank them in order of importance or are some of equal value?

3. In the past what kind of values have you encouraged in your child (for example- honesty, telling the truth, taking turns, etc.)? LEADER'S NOTE: ENCOURAGE THE PARENTS TO RECORD THEIR IDEAS IN THEIR NOTEBOOK.

4. How did you support this value? An example would be by your own actions or words.

5. How would you handle a difference in values between you and your next door neighbor? For example, if you think your child should come in the house from playing at 7 P.M. and get ready for bed and your neighbor with a child the same age lets her child come in whenever they want.

Summary

The leader and the parents together should summarize the important points in the VALUES section. LEADER'S NOTE: SOME OF THESE MIGHT BE:

1. WE ENCOURAGE AND DISCOURAGE MANY VALUES EACH DAY IN OUR INTERACTIONS WITH CHILDREN AND OTHERS.
2. IT WILL BE HELPFUL TO PARENTS IF THEY ARE AWARE OF WHAT VALUES THEY ARE EMPHASIZING WITH THEIR CHILDREN.
3. OBSERVING VALUES INCLUDES KNOWING, WANTING AND DOING THE RIGHT THING.

PLEASE ASK THE PARENTS TO ADD ANY THOUGHTS THAT MAY HAVE OCCURRED TO THEM AS YOU CLOSE THIS SESSION.

Chapter Five

STRESS

Being a good parent
is recognizing and managing stress

Review And Questions

1. Ask the parents to review and summarize some ideas from the last session. Try to elicit some specific examples that the parents remember and ask if they used any of the ideas that were discussed the last time.
2. Ask for any further comments and questions about the sessions in general or the last session in particular.

General Topic Information

1. Stress can come from inside a person or from their outside world. Some examples of commonly recognized stress are : time, money, no control of events, peer pressure, overload of responsibility and no time for yourself. Some of these come from within an individual and some are brought on by things in the world around us.
2. We all react to stress in one way or another. Some of us react by avoiding it, blowing up in anger, having a physical reaction such as a headache, stomachache, ulcer or going on a vacation.

3. Adults and children both have stress. Some negative characteristics are:
   a. the situation seems overwhelming.
   b. it is very difficult to handle alone but there doesn't seem to be anyone to help.
   c. you can't see a good solution to the situation.

Some positive characteristics are:
   a. we really will live through it.
   b. it can be an opportunity to grow because you have a chance to show yourself and others that you can get through a tough time successfully.
   c. you usually can find someone to help you with the problem.
   d. it is a sign of growing maturity when you can handle a stressful situation successfully.

4. Children depend on adults for stress control. We have an opportunity to emphasize the positive aspects when we help our children handle a stressful situation successfully and then recognize their skill.
5. Children react to stress in many of the same ways we do except they don't have the experience and maturity to know that solutions can be available.
6. Adults have the perspective of time- knowing that after a period of time, usually, the stressful situation will become less so and that we can take some positive

measures to handle our stress and to solve the problem.

Discussion Questions

1. List the kinds of stress that adults have.

   LEADER'S NOTE: ENCOURAGE PARENTS TO MAKE NOTES DURING THE DISCUSSION.

2. How do you handle stress?

3. How are adult and children's stress the same?

4. What are some specific stresses peculiar to adults?

5. What are some specific stresses peculiar to children?

6. Think of some ways that parents can help their child handle stress. LEADER'S NOTE: ENCOURAGE PARENTS TO MAKE NOTES CONCERNING THEIR IDEAS ABOUT THIS QUESTION AND TO SHARE THEIR THOUGHTS.

7. Think of a specific stress situation your child had within the last week. How was it resolved?
   LEADER'S NOTE: ENCOURAGE PARENTS TO THINK AND WRITE DOWN THEIR IDEAS ABOUT THIS AND TO SHARE AS THEY FEEL COMFORTABLE.

Summary

The leader and the parents together should summarize the important points in the STRESS section. LEADER'S NOTE: SOME POINTS MIGHT BE:

1. ADULTS AND CHILDREN BOTH HAVE STRESS. IT CAN COME FROM INSIDE OURSELVES OR FROM THE OUTSIDE WORLD.
2. IT IS IMPORTANT FOR CHILDREN TO LEARN THEY CAN HANDLE A STRESSFUL SITUATION. ADULTS CAN HELP CHILDREN KNOW THERE ARE A VARIETY OF WAYS TO HANDLE STRESS.
3. THE FIRST STEP IS THE RECOGNITION OF THE STRESS AND THE SECOND IS DEALING CONSTRUCTIVELY WITH IT.

ASK THE GROUP IF THEY HAVE ANY FINAL COMMENTS ON TODAY'S DISCUSSION.

Chapter Six

MAKING AND KEEPING RULES

Being a good parent
is knowing how and when to make rules and then keeping them

Review And Questions

1. Ask the parents to review and summarize some ideas from the last session. Try to elicit some specific examples that the parents remember and ask if they used any of the ideas that were discussed the last time.
2. Ask for any further comments and questions about the sessions in general or the last session in particular.

General Topic Information

1. There are written and unwritten rules that we all choose obey or disobey in our lives.
2. Some examples of written rules are:
   a. traffic laws
   b. how to get a car license
   c. payment of our credit card bills
   d. paying income taxes
   e. getting a marriage license
3. Some examples of unwritten rules are:
   a. getting in line at the grocery checkout
   b. saying "thank you"

c. responding when others speak to you

d. observing birthdays with a cake and party

e. answering the telephone when it rings

4. Rules can be a form of teaching discipline or of guidance for our children. Parents have the choice of making RULES a positive or negative experience for their children. When applied in the right way, the making of rules can be a positive experience. Children need to learn that life is really easier if they do not have to buck the rules and rule-makers all the time.

5. There are some RULES FOR MAKING RULES.

   a. There should be a purpose to the rule. It is not enough to have a rule "because I say so". Children cannot learn what to expect in the way of rules if they always are made up on the spur of the moment. It is also very difficult to remember and be consistent about rules that are constantly being made up and/or changed.

   b. Adults should agree on the rules so that children cannot use one adult against another.

   c. The important rules that you want to be always enforced should be as few in number as possible so they can be remembered.

   d. Rules should be consistent. If one rule is "you may not hit your sister" then it should always be true.

   e. As much as possible, rules should be true for

both adults and children. For example, if one rule you want your children to follow is no lying then this is a rule everyone in the family should follow quite consistently. Remember, children learn by example and by verbal reminding. They will be very quick to spot any inconsistencies in rules and question parents about them.

f. Rules should be enforceable and the enforcement should be consistent. If parents make a rule that children need to come in for dinner at 5:30 or a parent will come out of the house at 5:30 to help them, this is a rule that is both reasonable and can be enforced.

g. There should be a clear consequence for obeying or disobeying a rule. Consequences should be as immediate as possible. For example, a person might say: " Whoever gets their shoes and socks on first gets to choose if they want to sit in the front or back seat of the car on the way to school."

Discussion Questions

1. How would you define a rule? LEADER'S NOTE: ASK THE PARENTS TO WRITE DOWN THEIR DEFINITION AND THEN SHARE IT.

2. Who makes the rules in our lives?

3. How did you learn the rules that you live by?

4. Do we have to agree or like all the rules?

5. If not, what can we do about it?

6. How are adults reminded of rules?

7. Answer the questions below <u>through the eyes of your child</u>. LEADER'S NOTE: ENCOURAGE THE PARENTS TO FORMULATE THEIR THOUGHTS ABOUT THESE QUESTIONS AND MAKE NOTES.

   a. Who makes the rules?

b. How am I learning the rules?

c. Do I have to agree or like all the rules?

d. If I don't like the rules what can I do about it?

e. How am I reminded of the rules?

8. What is one rule you have for your child? LEADER'S NOTE: SUPPORT THE PARENTS IN THEIR WRITING DOWN THEIR IDEAS ABOUT THESE QUESTIONS. SOME EXAMPLES MIGHT BE WEARING A SEAT BELT, GOING TO BED AT A CERTAIN TIME, ASKING PERMISSION TO GO TO A FRIEND'S HOUSE TO PLAY, ETC.

   a. How did you decide this was a rule you wanted?

   b. How did you let your child know about the rule?

c. What are the consequences for obeying or not obeying the rule?

d. How do you enforce the rule?

9. What is a rule you would like to encourage? LEADER'S NOTE: ENCOURAGE THE PARENTS TO WRITE DOWN AND SHARE THEIR ANSWERS.

a. How can you do this most easily?

10. When can rules be broken?

Summary

The leader and the parents together should summarize the important points in the RULES section. LEADER'S NOTE: SOME OF THESE MIGHT BE:

1. THERE ARE WRITTEN AND UNWRITTEN RULES THAT WE LIVE BY.
2. RULES SHOULD BE AS FEW AS POSSIBLE AND SHOULD BE CONSISTENT.
3. THERE SHOULD BE CONSEQUENCES AND ENFORCEMENT FOR BOTH OBEYING AND DISOBEYING RULES.
4. RULES CAN BE USED AS A POSITIVE GUIDANCE FOR CHILDREN.

ASK THE PARTICIPANTS IF THEY HAVE ANY FINAL COMMENTS TO MAKE.

Chapter Seven

NEGATIVE FEELINGS

Being a good parent
is being aware of and handling negative feelings in a constructive manner

Review And Questions

1. Ask the parents to review and summarize some ideas from the last session. Try to elicit some specific examples that the parents remember and ask if they used any of the ideas that were discussed the last time.
2. Ask for any further comments and questions about the sessions in general or the last session in particular.

General Topic Information

1. Feelings are emotions that we have whether we like it or not. For example, our angry or happy feelings do not come from a conscious decision to "be angry or be happy."
2. Feelings usually appear before we are aware of how they are building up inside of us.
3. The point of decision comes when deciding what to do with the feelings that we have.
4. Usually our first response as a parent in dealing with expressions of feelings from children is to react in a way that resembles how our parents reacted to our feelings when we were children. Many people disagree

with how they remember their parents treated them. It is possible to change how we react with an awareness of our reactions and a conscious decision to change how we respond.

5. It is important to show children that you are a person who has honest emotions and feelings but that you have learned how to handle them without causing harm to your self or others.
6. Children are often frightened of strong emotion and its expression because they are afraid their feelings will get out of hand and harm will come to them. Children need to know that a strong adult is in charge when they are out of control and they will not be allowed to hurt themselves or others.
7. Some ideas on how to handle or resolve negative feelings are:

    a. acknowledge to the child that you know they have negative feelings. That allows children to know you are understanding them, even though you may disagree with their feelings.
    b. let the child know that you are available and want to help in the solution.
    c. try to analyze the situation in which the negative feelings occur.
    d. help to clarify the facts of the situation in case they have been misunderstood by the child.

e. there should be a follow-up plan to prevent the situation from reoccurring, if possible.

f. do not let yourself as the adult react or respond in the same way as the child so that you can model a successful resolution of the problem for the child.

g. recognize successful handling of feelings so that the child can be aware of his skill in handling the situation.

Discussion Questions

1. What makes adults have negative feelings, such as anger or jealousy?

2. What makes children have these same feelings? LEADER'S NOTE: TELL THE PARENTS IT IS IMPORTANT FOR THEM TO WRITE DOWN THEIR IDEAS ABOUT THESE QUESTIONS SO THAT THEY CAN LOOK AT THEM AT HOME AND THINK ABOUT THEM.

3. How do adults handle their negative feelings successfully? LEADER'S NOTE: SUGGEST IDEAS SUCH AS TALKING TO SOMEONE ABOUT IT, TAKING DIRECT ACTION TO MAKE THE SITUATION BETTER, GOING FOR A WALK, ETC.

4. How do you want your child to handle their negative feelings? LEADER'S NOTE: EMPHASIZE TO THE PARENTS HOW IMPORTANT IT IS FOR THEM TO WRITE DOWN THE IDEAS THEY HAVE ABOUT THESE DISCUSSION QUESTIONS.

5. Do adults and children handle their negative feelings in the same or different ways?

6. What are some ways of handling negative feelings that you do NOT want your child to use? LEADER'S NOTE: SOME WAYS MIGHT BE HITTING, TEMPER TANTRUMS, SAYING HURTFUL WORDS, ETC.

7. Problem solve a specific situation such as children going to bed at a certain time. Use ideas discussed in the rules session but also incorporate feelings of anger and jealousy about an older brother or sister getting to stay up later. What kind of rules are involved and how are they observed? How can parents acknowledge the feelings, help with the solution, and prevent themselves from having the same feelings of anger expressed by the child?

8. Relate the above situation to the discussion on stress.

   LEADER'S NOTE: WE ARE MORE LIKELY TO HAVE NEGATIVE FEELINGS WHEN WE ARE UNDER STRESSFUL SITUATIONS SUCH AS BEING TIRED, RUSHED FOR TIME, ETC.

Summary

The leader and the parents together should summarize the important points in the NEGATIVE FEELINGS session.

LEADER'S NOTE: SOME OF THESE MIGHT BE:

1. BOTH ADULTS AND CHILDREN HAVE HONEST NEGATIVE FEELINGS.
2. THESE FEELINGS SHOULD BE DEALT WITH IN A POSITIVE WAY SO THAT NO HURT OCCURS FOR PEOPLE OR OBJECTS.
3. THERE SHOULD BE DEFINITE STEPS TO HANDLE NEGATIVE FEELINGS WITH THE PARENTS ASSISTING THE CHILD IN THE SOLUTION.
4. PARENTS SHOULD DEMONSTRATE TO THE CHILD BY EXAMPLE THAT NEGATIVE FEELINGS CAN BE HANDLED CONSTRUCTIVELY.

BE SURE TO ALLOW THE PARTICIPANTS A FINAL OPPORTUNITY TO ADD ANY REMARKS THEY MAY HAVE ABOUT THIS MEETING.

Chapter Eight

FEARS VERSUS FEELING SAFE

Being a good parent
is knowing how to handle children's fears and helping
children feel safe and secure

Review And Questions

1. Ask the parents to review and summarize some ideas from the last session. Try to elicit some specific examples that the parents remember and ask if they used any of the ideas that were discussed the last time.
2. Ask for any further comments and questions about the sessions in general or the last session in particular.

General Topic Information

1. Fears and feeling safe are both emotions that adults and children experience. There are some similarities and some differences in these feelings according to age and experience.

   Some of the same types of fearful experiences common to all ages are:

   a. fear of being physically hurt
   b. fear or concern about new and strange experiences such as moving to a new city or neighborhood

c. fear that someone will not like you

2. Although the type of fear may be the same for an adult and child we all experience fear differently. For instance, adults can take specific preventative measures to lessen the fearful part of the experience of moving to a new city. Also, adults have usually had some experience with moving and know that even though it may be traumatic for a brief period, all of the problems will be resolved. For a child, the expression of this fear may be excessive crying and protesting that he/she does not want to leave their old friends or house. They do not have the background to know their new house probably will be just fine and that new friends can be made.
3. Adults can take positive action and feel more control and power over fearful situations.
4. Adults have a sense of time, i.e. knowing that most difficult situations pass with time.
5. Adults also have the advantage of knowing they will live through the situation, usually no worse for the wear.
6. Therefore, adults can help children live through a fearful situation by:
    a. acknowledging the honest expression of feelings so the child is aware you understand the fear
    b. letting children know they can take some positive and/or preventative action in any situation to lessen their fears

c. providing some direct action to gain control of the fear. For example, when moving to a new home have the child pack toys or clothing so that they are sure that their belongings are with them during the move.

d. providing back-up support and suggestions

e. giving positive feedback when a child takes positive action

7. Children are in the process of learning the difference between the real world and a fantasy world. Quite often they do not distinguish what can really happen from what they see on television. Although an impossible event may look real, most adults know that it really cannot happen. It is vital for a child's sense of safety and being secure that adults know the difference between real and not real events. That allows children to learn to depend on their own intellect to distinguish events in their lives.

8. Safety for a child involves:

a. knowing the ability of each child. For instance, one child of six may be trustworthy to go to a neighbor's home safely, but another child of six may not yet be at that point. Safety responsibility initially rests with a parent or guardian. With increasing age it can be shifted to the individual child.

b. another factor in considering a safe situation

for a child is having an objective assessment of the situation and environment. This would be true when deciding whether your child could play at another child's home. Perhaps your child is responsible and can make good safety decisions, but the environment at the other home is such that they would be endangered.

9. A child will feel safe when:

   a. they feel a degree of self-reliance
   b. they know that a responsible adult will be there to provide help when needed
   c. as much as possible prevention and pre-planning have helped to make the situation as safe as possible. A good example of this is when we ask our children to use seat belts in a car or when we have a plan of action in case of fire in our homes or a tornado.

Discussion Questions

1. What were some fears expressed by your child in the last six months? Examples would be scary television shows, another child refusing to play with them or being afraid to ride a new bike. LEADER'S NOTE: HAVE THE PARENTS JOT DOWN IN THEIR BOOKS SOME OF THEIR CHILD'S FEARS.

2. As a parent how did you handle these fears?

3. Can you think of an adult situation such as watching a late horror show with frightening scenes? What kinds of measures did you take to make the situation not as frightening? LEADER'S NOTE: THESE MIGHT INCLUDE TELLING YOURSELF THAT THIS WAS NOT REAL BUT ONLY A MOVIE, LEAVING THE ROOM, THINKING ABOUT SOMETHING ELSE OR GOING OUT TO THE KITCHEN AND GETTING SOMETHING TO EAT. ALL OF THESE ACTIONS ARE REALLY WAYS WE HAVE OF DEALING WITH FEARS.

4. What is the difference between being fearful and being careful? How can we teach children the difference between fear and safety? LEADER'S NOTE: CONTINUE TO ENCOURAGE THE PARENTS TO WRITE DOWN THEIR ANSWERS OR IDEAS. AN EXAMPLE THAT CAN BE USED FOR THIS QUESTION WOULD BE HOW WE HANDLE INDIVIDUALS WE DON'T KNOW WHO KNOCK ON OUR DOOR.

5. What preventative measures do you take each day? LEADER'S NOTE: EXAMPLES WOULD BE WEARING SEAT BELTS IN THE CAR, ARRANGING SAFE AND GOOD SITTERS FOR OUR CHILDREN, EATING HEALTHY FOODS, ETC.

6. How can we incorporate these same safety measures into our children's lives? LEADER'S NOTE: IT IS IMPORTANT TO HAVE THE PARENTS WRITE DOWN THEIR IDEAS AS A MEANS OF ENCOURAGING THEIR RETENTION OF WHAT IS LEARNED.

7. How do the topics of rules/discipline, values, communication and feelings influence our views of fear and safety?

8. How can we help a child learn the difference between what is real and not real? An example might be the "monsters" all children use to describe things they are afraid of but can't really name or describe. LEADER'S NOTE: WRITING DOWN FEARS IS A WAY OF GAINING CONTROL WHETHER IT BE FOR THE CHILD OR PARENT.

Summary

The leader and the parents together should summarize the important points in the FEARS VERSUS FEELING SAFE session. LEADER'S NOTE: SOME OF THESE POINTS MIGHT BE:

1. ADULTS AND CHILDREN ALL HAVE FEARS AND WANT TO FEEL SAFE.
2. ADULTS HAVE THE ADVANTAGE OF BEING ABLE TO KNOW THEY CAN TAKE POSITIVE ACTION AND HAVE A SENSE THAT THEY WILL LIVE THROUGH A FEARFUL SITUATION.
3. ADULTS CAN HELP CHILDREN MASTER THEIR FEARS BY COMMUNICATING A FEELING OF SUPPORT, USING THEIR POWER TO ANALYZE REAL VERSUS UNREAL AND HELPING CHILDREN TO TAKE POSITIVE ACTION TO OVERCOME THEIR FEARS.

BE SURE TO AGAIN INQUIRE IF THERE ARE ANY FINAL COMMENTS.

Chapter Nine

POSITIVE FEELINGS OF LOVE AND HAPPINESS

Being a good parent
is enjoying a loving and happy relationship with your child

Review And Questions

1. Ask the parents to review and summarize some ideas from the last session. Try to elicit some specific examples that the parents remember and ask if they used any of the ideas that were discussed the last time.
2. Ask for any further comments and questions about the sessions in general or the last session in particular.

General Topic Information

1. A loving and happy relationship allows for opportunity to change and grow with time and age.
2. A loving and happy relationship allows freedom for both parents and child to grow with a solid base of love and understanding.
3. This type of relationship allows for some honest mistakes to be made on both sides and allows for forgiveness. There is an understanding and acknowledgement that parents and child are not perfect but can be loved anyway.

4. This relationship needs communication both ways regarding many of the things that we have discussed earlier such as negative feelings, stress and learning.
5. In a loving and happy relationship there is a commitment to doing what is best for each other and for oneself. Each person has rights and needs that are unique and important, both to himself and to the other members of the family.
6. ENJOYMENT of each other should be an important part of the relationship. There are many situations in our daily lives where we have a choice of how to react to a problem or event. Parents can set a positive or negative tone by their actions.
7. A loving and happy relationship lets each person feel free to express their own emotions, either positively or negatively, as long as it is not done in a hurtful or mean manner. Children need to learn to say I love you, or I'm angry, or I'm sad, etc. These feeling should be acknowledged and dealt with in a constructive manner.

Discussion Questions

1. Think of a happy time with your child within the last week. What went into making it a happy time? Was it spontaneous or planned? It could be such things as reading a book, working in the yard or going to an amusement park. LEADER'S NOTE: CONTINUE TO ENCOURAGE PARENTS TO RECORD THEIR IDEAS AND THOUGHTS ABOUT EACH QUESTION.

2. Why did you enjoy it? Why did your child enjoy it?

3. How has the relationship between you and your child remained the same since birth? LEADER'S NOTE: SOME ANSWERS MIGHT BE MUTUAL ENJOYMENT, STRONGER LOVE, LEARNING HOW TO LIVE IN SAME HOUSE HAPPILY, ETC.

4. How has the relationship changed between you and your child since birth? LEADER'S NOTE: THE ANSWERS MIGHT BE THAT THEIR CHILD HAS BECOME MORE INDEPENDENT, HAS GREATER ABILITY TO COMMUNICATE, NEEDS LESS PHYSICAL CARE, ETC.

5. What are some of the things that get in the way of a loving and happy relationship? LEADER'S NOTE: THESE MIGHT BE STRESS, TIME, DAILY CHORES, SCHEDULES, ETC.

6. How would you like to make your relationship with your child more loving and happy? LEADER'S NOTE: HAVE THE PARENTS WRITE DOWN SPECIFIC IDEAS, IF POSSIBLE, AND SHARE THEM IF THEY WOULD LIKE.

7. What are some positive steps that you would like to make to change some part of the relationship with your child? LEADER'S NOTE: ENCOURAGE THE PARENTS TO RECORD THESE STEPS SO THEY CAN CHECK THEIR PROGRESS.

Summary

The leader and parents together should summarize the important points of the LOVING AND HAPPY RELATIONSHIP session. LEADER'S NOTE: SOME OF THESE MIGHT BE:

1. IT IS IMPORTANT TO ENJOY EACH OTHER.
2. A LOVING AND HAPPY RELATIONSHIP ALLOWS FOR FREEDOM TO GROW AND CHANGE WITH TIME.

3. A LOVING AND HAPPY RELATIONSHIP ALLOWS FOR MISTAKES AND FORGIVENESS.
4. PARENTS HAVE THE OPPORTUNITY TO MODEL A GOOD RELATIONSHIP WITH THEIR CHILDREN IN THEIR REACTIONS TO THEIR CHILDREN AND EACH OTHER.

AT THE END BE SURE TO ASK IF THERE ARE ANY FINAL COMMENTS ON THIS DISCUSSION.

Chapter Ten

SEX EDUCATION FOR THE PRESCHOOL CHILD

**Being a good parent is
being able to factually answer your child's questions about sex**

Review And Questions

1. Ask the parents to review and summarize some ideas from the last session. Try to elicit some specific examples that the parents remember and ask if they used any of the ideas that were discussed the last time.
2. Ask for any further comments and questions about the sessions in general or the last session in particular.

General Topic Information

1. This is a topic that may be difficult for us talk about as adults and therefore, difficult for us talk about with our children.
2. By our voices, body language or facial expressions we may convey to our children that we feel reluctant, embarrassed or unsure of ourselves when we try to answer even simple questions children ask about where babies come from or about anatomical differences between boys and girls.
3. It may be easier if we use some factually prepared

material as a starting point, such as age-appropriate books. LEADER'S NOTE: THE LEADER SHOULD HAVE AVAILABLE AT THIS POINT, SOME BOOKS FOR PARENTS TO LOOK THROUGH AND SOME TIME SHOULD BE SPENT IN THIS ACTIVITY. THESE SHOULD BE READILY AVAILABLE TO PARENTS, E.G. THROUGH A PUBLIC LIBRARY OR SCHOOL, SO THAT THEY CAN BE USED FOR REFERENCES AT A LATER DATE. SOME BOOKS THAT HAVE BEEN REVIEWED BY PARENTS AND FOUND APPROPRIATE ARE:

Andry, A. and Schepp, S.: HOW BABIES ARE MADE. New York, Time Life Books, 1968.

Sheffield, M.: BEFORE YOU WERE BORN. New York, Knopf, 1984.

Sheffield, M.: WHERE DO BABIES COME FROM. NEW YORK, KNOPF, 1973

4. Often a child's first questions will stem from an actual observation, e.g., the pregnancy of someone they know, observation of anatomical differences between boys and girls, etc.
5. It is best to give honest, direct answers that are within the experience and interest of a preschool child and to use the correct anatomical term such as your physician would use in discussion of a medical issue. This prevents any misunderstanding that might develop in your discussion.
6. It is important to remember that if you don't answer questions and give correct information your child will get information from someone else that may not be as appropriate for your child and may not be handled as

well. By being available to your child you can control the information and encourage your child to continue to ask questions freely with you later.

7. A good rule of thumb to use about giving information to your child is to TELL THEM WHEN THEY BEGIN TO ASK. This may be at age 2, 3 or 4 years.
8. You should tell enough to satisfy their curiosity and to answer their questions, but do not volunteer too much information that they are not ready yet to understand. A parent may sometimes have to read "signals" that a child is curious and respond to signals such as trying to observe someone of the opposite sex in the bathtub. Parents know their own children best and can be uniquely sensitive to their child's level of understanding and curiosity.
9. It is at this age that values of body privacy can be encouraged. Children can be encouraged to respect their own bodies and those of others. Also, this can be an important time of helping sex identification that goes beyond anatomical differences, e.g., boys grow up to have beards, deeper voices and girls grow up to have bodies like their mother.

Discussion Questions

1. What do you think about the books we looked through earlier? Are they ones you might use with your own children? How would you use them?

2. What kinds of questions have your children already asked about babies such as where they come from, how boys are different from girls, etc.

3. How did you handle the questions- successfully, with difficulty, with embarrassment, passing the buck, etc. ?

4. If you had had warning that the question was coming and been prepared, would you have handled it any differently? LEADER'S NOTE: ENCOURAGE PARENTS TO WRITE DOWN NOTES ABOUT THEIR ANSWERS.

5. If parents feel comfortable, construct a broad outline of information that would be appropriate to tell a preschool child in answer to their questions of where babies come from and how do they grow? Use some key words such as seed, uterus/stomach, father's fluid, fertilized, baby, and birth. LEADER'S NOTE: IT MAY BE EASIER FOR PARENTS TO INDIVIDUALLY WRITE A PARAGRAPH IN THEIR OWN NOTEBOOKS AND THEN TO SHARE AS THEY FEEL COMFORTABLE.

Summary

The leader and the parents together should summarize the important points in the SEX EDUCATION session.

LEADER'S NOTE: SOME OF THESE POINTS MIGHT BE:

1. THIS IS A SUBJECT THAT MAY BE DIFFICULT TO THINK ABOUT OURSELVES AND TALK ABOUT WITH OUR CHILDREN.
2. AGE-APPROPRIATE BOOKS MAY BE HELPFUL IN EXPLAINING IDEAS OR ANSWERING QUESTIONS.
3. HONEST DIRECT ANSWERS WITH USE OF CORRECT WORDS ARE BEST.
4. TELL CHILDREN ABOUT SEX WHEN THEY BEGIN TO ASK QUESTIONS, BUT ONLY ANSWER THE QUESTIONS AND DON'T GIVE THEM MORE INFORMATION THAN THEY ARE READY FOR.

Chapter Eleven

EXPLAINING DEATH TO A PRESCHOOL CHILD

Being a good parent is
being able to help your child cope with the topic of death

Review And Questions

1. Ask the parents to review and summarize some ideas from the last session. Try to elicit some specific examples that the parents remember and ask if they used any of the ideas that were discussed the last time.
2. Ask for any further comments and questions about the sessions in general or the last session in particular.

General Topic Information

1. This subject is one that most people have some strong beliefs about either on a religious, personal, cultural or family basis.
2. This session is not to change anyone's thoughts or views but rather to help parents put their ideas into words that preschool children can understand and accept.
3. Death is often a trying, difficult and hard to understand time for adults. It is often more so for their children because it may be their first exposure to the experience, whether the loss is a family member, pet, neighbor or other significant person in their life.

4. Most children will experience the idea of death through observation of a dead bird, squirrel or insect that will bring up questions about what has happened and why the body can't move anymore. This may trigger questions and requests for information, e.g., what happens to people when they no longer can move, can they get better, why did they die, etc. This experience can be a helpful one to a child if parents are able to answer questions honestly and directly. Then this information will be available at the time of the death of a family member.
5. Some children may handle the death of a family member by going backward in their behavior, e.g., being afraid to leave a parent, frequent waking up at night or deliberate disobedience of previously observed rules. This may be their way of asking for additional attention or help during a time when parents are often busy with other people or their responsibilities.
6. Children may not express grief in the same way as adults. Adults often will spend a lot of time talking to other family members or friends about their sadness and generally expressing their grief through words. Children may not have the verbal skills to do this as easily as adults, so parents need to help children put their feelings into words. LEADER'S NOTE: SEE SECTION ON COMMUNICATION, PARTICULARLY THE DISCUSSION ON "TALKING FOR A CHILD".

7. Some children are so frightened at what they don't understand, they may pretend that nothing has really happened in the hope their lives will go on normally as in the past.
8. Some general suggestions are:
    a. Keep the daily routine of bedtime, meals, etc. as normal as possible so that children can feel secure in knowing their lives can go on the same or as close as possible despite the initial changes in family routine.
    b. Make sure an adult is available to the child to answer questions and give reassurance.
    c. Not all adults will react the same way to a loss so children should not be expected to be different. Be alert for ways that will best help your own child.
    d. Make sure the child knows that a responsible person is always there to take care of them and to provide whatever help they might need.
9. Three steps that will help children get through a time of death and grief are:
    a. Acknowledgment of the loss.
    b. Time for sadness and expressions of feelings of the loss.
    c. Reassurance that their lives will go on and that they will learn to live with the loss, just as adults do.

10. It may be helpful to have available some resource books that parents can read and share with their children to help develop a discussion. These books should be readily available to parents for future reference, e.g., through the public school of public library. The following books have been found helpful by parents.

Brown, M.W.: THE DEAD BIRD. New York, Young Scott Books, 1958.

Cohen, M.V.: JIM'S DOG MUFFINS. NEW YORK, Greenwillow Books, 1984.

Harris, A.: WHY DID HE DIE? Minneapolis, Lerner Publications, 1965.

LEADER'S NOTE: DISTRIBUTE BOOKS TO PARENTS FOR THEM TO LOOK AT AND DISCUSS WITH THEIR FELLOW GROUP MEMBERS AS TO THE USEFULNESS WITH THEIR CHILDREN. MAKE SURE YOU ALLOW AMPLE TIME FOR THIS EXPERIENCE.

Discussion Questions

1. As parents, where do your ideas and beliefs about death originate? For example, they may come from church, parents, reading, discussion with the family, etc.

2. How have you communicated these ideas to your children?

3. Have your children had any experience with dying, e.g., a pet, family member or neighbor?

4. Did they ask any questions about the event and if so, how did you come up with the answers?

5. Are you satisfied with how you answered the questions or what you would like to add to the answers now that you have had a chance to think about it?

6. In what ways do adults and children understand death the same?

7. In what ways do adults and children understand death differently?

8. If parents feel comfortable, construct a broad outline of information they think would be appropriate to give to a preschool child about death and dying. LEADER'S NOTE: IT MAY BE EASIER FOR PARENTS TO INDIVIDUALLY WRITE A SHORT PARAGRAPH IN THEIR OWN NOTEBOOKS AND THEN SHARE AS MUCH OR LITTLE AS THEY FEEL COMFORTABLE IN DOING. THE IMPORTANT THING IS THAT PARENTS THINK THROUGH THEIR BELIEFS ABOUT DEATH AND DECIDE HOW THEY WANT TO SHARE THESE IDEAS WITH THEIR CHILDREN.

Summary

The leader and the parents together should summarize the important points in the DEATH AND DYING DISCUSSION.

SOME OF THESE MIGHT BE:

1. THIS IS A SUBJECT THAT IS DIFFICULT FOR ADULTS TO TALK ABOUT AND DIFFICULT TO EXPLAIN TO CHILDREN.
2. AGE-APPROPRIATE BOOKS MAY BE HELPFUL IN FACILITATING INFORMATION GIVING OR ANSWERING OF QUESTIONS BY CHILDREN.
3. IT IS IMPORTANT FOR PARENTS, AHEAD OF ANY DEATHS, TO FORMULATE THEIR BELIEFS ABOUT DEATH AND DYING SO THAT THE SUBJECT CAN BE DEALT WITH HONESTLY AND OPENLY WITH THEIR CHILDREN.

Chapter Twelve

FAMILY LIFE

Being a good parent is
making a child feel secure within a "family"

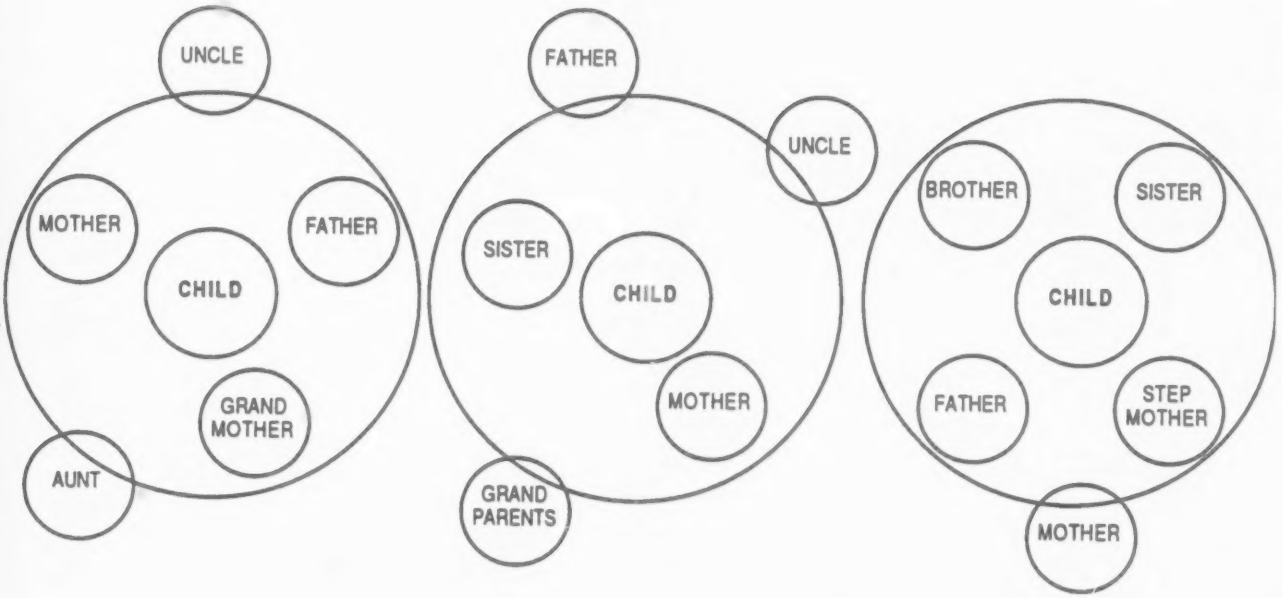
Review And Questions

1. Ask the parents to review and summarize some ideas from the last session. Try to elicit some specific examples that the parents remember and ask if they used any of the ideas that were discussed the last time.
2. Ask for any further comments and questions about the sessions in general or the last session in particular.

General Topic Information

1. The word "family" can mean many different things and can encompass many different actual groupings of individuals, e.g., one parent families, step parents, two parent families, grandparents raising young children, foster homes, etc.
2. For a preschool child it is important to know that a core center adult or adults are always there to take care of them and who will love them unconditionally.

3. This core center of families can be illustrated by drawing a circle which encompasses the child and other significant immediate adults who are closely tied to each other. Then additional connecting circles can be drawn to represent other important persons in a child's life. Some possibilities might be:



4. Living within each unique family group means living with changes, adjustments, fun-times, stress, happiness, death and many different experiences and emotions. However, through all of these experiences, a preschool child can continue to grow and develop most effectively if there is a sure knowledge that the center of family life is strong.
5. Some characteristics of a strong family life are:
    a. A commitment to each other, e.g., sharing common interests and activities.
    b. Good communication. (LEADER'S NOTE: REFER TO THE SECTION ON COMMUNICATION, ESPECIALLY THE CONCEPTS OF TALKING <u>WITH</u>, <u>TO</u> AND <u>FOR</u> A CHILD.
    C. Spending time together in daily activities such as eating, working, talking and sharing fun activities. Such activities might include a trip to the park, a walk around the block discussing things observed, playing age appropriate games or working with a child in learning a new skill such as singing songs.
    d. Common values. LEADER'S NOTE: REFER TO THE SESSION ON VALUES AND WHAT THE GROUP DECIDED WERE COMMON VALUES EACH OF THEIR FAMILIES CONSIDERED IMPORTANT.

Discussion Questions

1. Who makes up your family group? LEADER'S NOTE: ENCOURAGE PARENTS TO DRAW THEIR OWN FAMILY CIRCLES THAT WILL ILLUSTRATE HOW THEY VIEW THEIR CORE FAMILY GROUPING.

2. How did you decide what went into each inner circle and what went into the connected circles?

3. What characteristics would you list as important in a family? LEADER'S NOTE: A PARENT MIGHT LIST SOME OF THE ONES PREVIOUSLY DISCUSSED SUCH AS VALUES, COMMUNICATION, ETC. AS WELL AS ONES UNIQUE TO THEIR OWN SITUATION.

4. What characteristics would your child list as important to a family?

5. What are one or two things you think are particular strengths of your family?

6. What are one or two things you would like to change about your family? LEADER'S NOTE: SOME THINGS MIGHT BE MORE TIME DOING ACTIVITIES TOGETHER, MORE OPEN DISCUSSIONS OF PROBLEMS, ETC.

7. What are some similarities among two-parent families, one-parent families and families with a step parent?

8. What are some differences among two-parent families, one-parent families and families with a step parent?

9. What answers in question #3 apply to questions #7 and #8?

Summary

The leader and the parents together should summarize the important points in the FAMILY discussion. LEADER'S NOTE: SOME OF THESE MIGHT BE:

1. "FAMILY" IS A WORD THAT IS DIFFERENT FOR EACH PARENT AND CHILD.
2. IT IS IMPORTANT FOR A CHILD TO BE SURE OF A CORE CENTER OF ADULTS WHO WILL BE THERE FOR SUPPORT AND CARE-TAKING.
3. THERE ARE CHARACTERISTICS OF A STRONG FAMILY THAT MAY VARY FROM FAMILY TO FAMILY, DEPENDING ON INDIVIDUALS AND SITUATIONS.

Suggested Further Readings

Because parents may be interested in further readings the following books are suggested. They are only a few among many good sources. These are ones that are clearly written and should be easily available from a local library or bookstore. It is also suggested that parents contact their local librarian for help in finding more information.

AMES, LOUISE & CHASE, JOAN. **DON'T PUSH YOUR PRESCHOOLER.** HARPER AND ROW, NEW YORK: 1980

CHILDREN'S TELEVISION WORKSHOP. **PARENT'S GUIDE TO RAISING KIDS WHO LOVE TO LEARN: INFANT TO GRADE SCHOOL.** PRENTICE-HALL PRESS, NEW YORK: 1989

GINOTT, HAIM. **BETWEEN PARENT AND CHILD.** MACMILLAN PRESS, NEW YORK: 1965

POPPER, ADRIENNE. **PARENT'S BOOK OF THE TODDLER YEARS.** BALLENTINE BOOKS, NEW YORK: 1986

SALK, LEE. **WHAT EVERY CHILD WOULD LIKE HIS PARENTS TO KNOW.** DAVID MCKAY CO., NEW YORK, 1972.

SALK, LEE & KRAMER, RITA. **HOW TO RAISE A HUMAN BEING.** RANDOM HOUSE, NEW YORK: 1969